

# BLACK HISTORY

## An historical look at Kwanzaa in Winston-Salem: The past and present inform us

BY FELECIA PIGGOTT-LONG, PHD

Duane Jackson and Rachel Jackson have often been hailed as the Father and Mother of Kwanzaa in Winston-Salem because they learned about the celebration in the Greensboro area during the 1970s, invited others to learn about it, and then brought the knowledge to the Twin City to foster connections of hope. The Jackson couple met regularly with members of the Pan African Society from the campus of N.C. A&T State University. Duane Jackson had relocated from Chicago and he was eager to learn about Kwanzaa.

Duane and Rachel had an African wedding of their own on Nov. 9, 1974, at St. Philips Moravian Church on Bon Air Avenue, where the late Rev. Dr. Cedric Rodney officiated. Musa and Barbara Ferguson Kamara, natives of Sierra Leone and members of the Pan African Society, served as the emcees of their wedding. Afterward, they kept in contact with one another.

Musa and Barbara Kamara invited Duane and Rachel Jackson to the East

(1977-1985) and he wanted to get involved in the Kwanzaa movement.

Joseph and Gail Anderson of The Healing Force usually provided entertainment for the Kwanzaa meeting.

"There was no Kwanzaa without the performance of the Healing Force. They were a central part of the entertainment," said Griggs. "Everybody else was just talking."

The Healing Force had just relocated from New York where Joseph Anderson modeled for the New Breed manufacturing company that designed fashions to fit the African American male and female frame. Jason and Mable Benning, owners of New Breed, designed the dashiki and The Healing Force sang in African attire.

"Very few of the attendees wore African attire at that time. African attire was new in the South. Kwanzaa was just beginning to catch on in the South," said Joseph Anderson. "We were seeking and yearning for that connective oneness, that warmth and hunger for knowledge. We knew we had to go back to Winston-Salem to build it up."



Duane and Rachel Jackson were the founders of the Kwanzaa celebration in Winston-Salem. They are pictured here with their daughter Ayanna Jackson.

ing those days because the City was constantly trying to find a way to close the library in the African American community,"

Salem began in 1990 when I was a reporter for the Winston-Salem Chronicle and an elder in the Kemet School of Knowledge at Emmanuel Baptist Church. I solicited the assistance of families and leaders in the community to accept a night of Kwanzaa in various homes, churches and centers. Leaders who participated at this time were: Ernie Pitt and Elaine Pitt, Rev. Dr. John Mendez and Sarah Mendez, Emmanuel Baptist Church, Rev. Dr. Carlton Eversley, Dellabrook Presbyterian Church, Ben Piggott and family, Dr. Dee Smith of the Winston-Salem Urban League, The North Carolina Black Repertory Company, Forsyth County Public Library, and Grace Presbyterian Church. Many of these members have continued to serve as leaders of Kwanzaa for more than 30 years.

In 2007, Triad Cultural Arts, under the direction of Cheryl Harry, continued the mission with the help of many of the original leaders and adding others. The citywide

Kwanzaa committee has been chaired by Rutherford Moorman of the East Winston CDC and Neighbors for Better Neighborhoods and co-chaired by Luci Vaughn. Committee members include Renee Andrews, Emma Shouse, Cheryl Harry, Dana Suggs, Ben Piggott, Patricia Sadler, and myself, and others are joining day by day. Triad Cultural Arts held its first virtual Kwanzaa week on the Zoom platform in 2020. Each night more than 70 families participated and hundreds joined the gathering through Facebook.

"Although the pandemic has its negative attributes, our first virtual

Kwanzaa allowed us to reach out to many new Kwanzaa participants. Because travel was limited, more family members had the opportunity to attend all seven nights, to learn from each morning and nightly presentation," said Harry. "We had a strong technology team who worked together to make Kwanzaa happen. Technology was key. Dr. Kia Hood-Scott, Magalie Yacinthe, Dr. Felecia Piggott-Long, and Allan Younger took the lead as panelists, guest speakers, dancers, educators, artists, and performers that supported the foundation. We did it together."



The children join in the final Harambee at the East Winston Library. Lucia Vaughn, James Grace and Reynita McMillan help light the Kinara at the East Winston Library in 1996.

White Oak Community Center to glean from the program created by the Pan African Society for three years. The Jacksons invited friends and members from the Winston-Salem Improvement Society to attend as well. Some of the attendees included Khalid Griggs, chairman of the Winston-Salem Improvement Society, Baba Joseph Anderson and Gail Anderson of The Healing Force, Hashim Saleh of the Otesha Dance and Music Ensemble, Larry Little, and Josette Clark, among others.

Approximately 70 people attended the first Kwanzaa gathering at the East Winston Library in 1979. Griggs had just relocated from Atlanta and Washington, D.C., and Clark had relocated from Trenton, N.J. Little was serving on the Winston-Salem Board of Aldermen

"It did not make sense for all of the conscious people to have to go to Greensboro. We had to connect with Winston-Salem," said Griggs.

Sylvia Sprinkle-Hamlin celebrated Kwanzaa when she was living in Philadelphia in 1975 and she would create a large display window for Kwanzaa at the Central Library when she was over Children's Outreach. She and members of the staff would take Kwanzaa information to Sprague Street Recreation Center, Happy Hill Gardens and Kimberley Park Recreation Center. Duane and Rachel Jackson were also active in programs at the East Winston Library. They presented the idea to the East Winston Friends of the Library.

"It was important for us to create special programs for families at the East Winston Library dur-

said Rachel Jackson.

The East Winston Friends of the Library chose to celebrate the principal of Kuumba (Creativity) as the major principle each year. Those involved in leadership during the early years included librarian Margaret Allen, Dottie Butler, Jane Steele, Barbara Anderson, Pat Wright Stepney, Shirley Hairston Holloway, Renee Brown Andrews, Tim Jackson, and Sylvia Sprinkle-Hamlin. Others who were involved during the early years were J. C. Simpson of the Friends Group; Louise Wilson, ESR Director; Mrs. M. Earl F. Benson, tutorial coordinator; Mazie Woodruff, Library Board; Photographer Santana; Bill Jackson, poet and rapper; Burning Spear Reggae Band; and Amattulah Saleem, among others.

The citywide observance of Kwanzaa for seven nights in Winston-

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